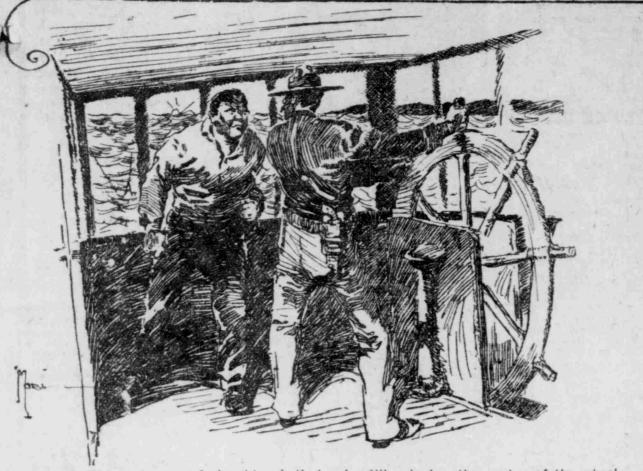
The Harvesting



The cowboy was facing him, both hands still gripping the spokes of the wheel.

"Say," said the ex-clerk, Lansing | "Jes' cinch up that mug o' yours, wires with his knife, and soon he no-alias "Danny the Rat," as his soft, pardner," said Masters quickly, and ticed that the oyster tug, whatever white hands closed numbly around the of the southwest. 'Set here a minute, "She ain't sparkin' right frost rimmed butts of the oars, "this second-story work from 2 to 4, wind and tide permittin', ain't what I'm used to: I quit after this job, that's right-" he was grumbling on when Murphy interrupted him with a jolt between his "Shut up-here's somebody a-com-

Both men crouched lower in the boat, and Murphy, gripping an icy spile, passed them beneath the planking of

The swift footsteps slapped louder on the frozen boards; men hurrying flatfootedly and panting beneath a heavy burden; accompanying them there were thumped their own engine, as Salters lighter footfalls. "There's somebody with 'em," whis-

pered the sharp-sensed clerk. He raised his ferret face cautiously above the rim of the plankwalk.

ketch the fairy?" "Huh," panted the larger of the men, "huh, git the boat 'longside, can't yehuh," he was breathing fast and heavily, and the sweat on his thick-muscled face glistened in the moonlight. One gripped several parts of tarred dragged behind the two, and in dan-quickly toward her. ger of being crowded into the water.

Lansing drew back. "Ho!" on," he arled. "I ain't in for no kidnappin"."

A pallid face was turned up.

"Take the girl-huh-" wheezed Salt-

hard voice from above. "Oh, she's all right," panted Salters. 'Now, then, matey-hell, but she's in his face. heavy - now. Masters-heave-o-huh, heave-o-luk out below.

steps rang out on the shoreward end of the jetty. Four dark figures slipped asked in a trembling voice. from behind the oar locker and the

wound between knee and ankle.

lowed Masters into the boat. "Here. gimme them oars-here comes some more-touch 'em up again, matey.'

Lights had begun to flash from winswiftly along the waterside; the hoarse voice came down from above. wounded on the jetty were shooting from where they lay, and their bullets fellers in a-gainin' on us. were cutting the water close to the swiftly drawing away.

saw black figures streaking moonlit blotted the bridge of the moon.

panted Salters. 'Huh-huh-huh." with each heavy stroke, and from somewhere in the shadow he was coyote. answered by a series of staccato

tone, an ugly tone, and broke into la-bored profanities, "they got a gasoline

"Ah, so have we-and we got our guns, too!" snarled Murphy. "Masters can use his'n all right-o; you got them

fellers in one, two, three order.' "Oh, they ain't hurt much," said "I didn't shoot to kill; jes'

The beat of the distant engine grew white object flashed in the moonlight.

the tide and the gale; she was an able against the glaring white of the deck-other and climbed below to the hot, oily a possible danger. vessel, built to carry sail beneath such breezes as then blew. Her spars were aked of canvas, and a raised wheel

"One o' you fellows cut her loose."

- rope," snarled Murphy forward. Masters leaped to his aid. "Me hands is that numb I can't open whipped a blade from his belt and drew it across the tense hawser, which parted, a strand wiping the skin from Murphy's jaw. Less than a quarter of a mile up stream the oyster tug was

"Chug-chug, chug-chug, chug-chug," set in motion the heavy flywheel, and successive explosions began to heat the powerful cylinders. Salters leaped into the wheel house and began to shove Gee," he whispered, "where 'd ye wide arc and a moment later was racing out to sea.

pursuers, almost indifferently; he start-citedly. ocean was there; the ocean of which he rope slung about a small safe carried eye fell upon the huddled figure of the between the two men: with the other girl and his face lost its eager inten-he clutched the arm of a woman, half sity and became kind. He stepped ble.

He began to stammer. "I-er-Salt- at that." Down came the safe with a crash, ma'am. You know," he went on eagerripping out part of the gunnel and ly, "we didn't want to carry you off on the rush of the icy wind, and the passed through the roof of the deli-

"Where are you taking me."

revolver from the pocket of his over- come down in the cabin now. I reckon hatch. Masters rolled the prostrate "Which leaves me and the green A man whirled sideways, and would have fallen into the water had not one her below. Striking a match, he dis-Salters fired twice again and missed, glowed a dull red, made the cabin more and then there came at his shoulder than comfortably warm, but not dis- reckon I could if you showed me how standing at the foot of the ladder.

"Come on!" cried Salters, and fol- about with involutary interest,

dows near by; men were running stared at the young man curiously. A "Hey, Masters, come on up. Them

boat; one knocked a splinter from the and climbed to the deck. Murphy pointblade of an oar, but beneath the bull- ed astern; in the blaze of the moonlight

The alarm was now general, and they separating distance. Masters regarded her with a spaces and swallowed in the shadows calculating eye; often he had shot coy-Ahead of them a black hull otes in the lambent moonlight of the tle this way—huh—you don't need to swamp. estimation that the black cluster on her

forward deck loomed larger than any Six reports from the pursuers came in quick succession, splinters flew. "Huh!" panted Salters, in an altered Murphy at the wheel cursed; Salters stepped behind the wheel house, coveting the corner of seveneighths-inch pine, Masters, a fine target in the full blaze of the moon, spun his forty-four by the fared. trigger guard on his index finger and

> 'Them fellers is gainin'," she'd oughter. Why don't you open up het up she'll run like a scart dog,' on 'em, Masters, you're such a dandy added. with a gun?

measured the distance again.

louder; further up the inlet a moving ters indifferently. He sauntered aft dies?" "One o' them oyster tugs," said Mur- light-hearted, in a rollicking mood born at what loomed suddenly on the sky The grip of the ebb tide whirled them perience, the salt, icy spray, the tumof this new, strange, exhilarating ex- line. down swiftly to a long black hull which bling tide-rip through which they iceberg? was edging back and forth, tugging at swashed; he threw his weapon above her hawser, impatient to be off with his head and stood a sharp target where it's still water," answered the

Three shots from the tug cut close, was there, all but comatose from nauaked of canvas, and a raised wheel "Look out, boys!" called Masters, and sea.

ouse showed that she carried power. began to shoot "into a bunch," as he Masters gripped the little wheel in a Fifty or sixty bushels of frozen oy- would have said. Men dropped behind glory of achievement. He had awaited in the face. would have said. Men dropped behind glory of achievement. He had awaited the bulwarks, some of their own actie charge of a grizzly on foot, with a cord, some of his; then, when he had rifle in his hands; he had fled across the back. It seems like runnin' a fellow's gasped Salters, gripping the high bullwarks in his gorilla hand. "Lansing, his beat of his own engine had him beat of his own engine had him his dittered in rhythm. Previously it had him he beat of his own engine had at his heels. He had helped to hold up the little trap through which the wheelhitch the boat while I start the ingyne—"

"You will not be running your head."

It was nearly noon when the disabled.

"You will not be running your head." Murphy ran forward, Lansing seizing was: "Juba-this, Juba-this, through the glittering, star-flecked, Murphy ran toward, Lansing seizing the stiff painter, let the small boat slew astern, and Masters, reaching down, lifted the woman in his muscular arms and swung her to the egill expanse of ocean ahead! This ocean, previously to him a myth, "Gee!" sniggered Lansing. "I'd fergot the canary!"

was: "Juba-that, Juba-that, Juba-that

"She ain't sparkin' right-them dymiss," he said in a voice of such gen- names is on the bum-" he heard Salttleness that the Rat began to snigger ers complaining below; and then it occurred to him that the woman in the Hey, there, gimme a hand to cut cabin might be frightened at the sound

As he went below she shrank away me knife," said Murchy. Masters from him; it was an imperceptible motive of friendliness, "huh, you just movement, but his frontiersman's sensibilities had in many ways the keen

of firing, and he hastened to reassure

edge of a child's. "Don't you be afraid, ma'am." said comfortingly, "that shootin' was racing down on the brim of the ebb just a little fun. There's some boys a-chasin' us on a sort of little tugboat, and since they got shootin' I kinder returned the compliment.

"Was-was any one hurt?" she asked tremulously.

"I reckon not, I wa'an't tryin' very hard. It's too pretty a night to kill as there's any danger of gettin people," he continued cheerfully. "Too picht, if we sin't took we c'n slip into down the spokes, the sloop turned in a bad it's so cold, though; you'd ought to set up there and see them big waves! Masters glanced astern toward the Why, even this ship's beginnin' to rock!

There 'd you feel that?" he cried ex-"Didn't you feel her tip? There ed ahead with a leaping heart; the she goes agen!" He leaned toward her, his eyes sparkling like a boy's, one hand of admiring interest. "was this your had heard so much, dreamed so many steadying himself against the bulkhead. times, and never seen! Then his roving The woman started at his curiously. 'You are not used to the sea?" she

guard at the doorway when she in some trouble out there and then met backed hurriedly down the ladder, and had surprised Salters in the study. up with Salters, who was layin' low with one foot on the last rung half "French maid," Salters had growled, as down in Sonora. He got me into this, turned and slid his right hand into his "French maid," Salters nad growied, as he emerged from the house with the house with the house with the house with the bow.

"Gentle with the lady!" snapped a "French maid," Salters nad growied, as he emerged from the house with the woman, terrified to muteness, "If we leave her here all hands gets nabbed." Now, as he looked down at her, what- in time. But never mind, ma'am, don't but his keen eyes were watching for the but his keen eyes were watching for the but his keen eyes were watching for the salter. The cowboy was facing him, both hands tin time. But never mind, ma'am, don't but his keen eyes were watching for the salter. ever of chivalry there was in Masters you worry none. I'll make it my par- muscular contraction which in a man recognized the caste and felt the blood ticular business to see that you get of Salters' massive strength must pre-

frozen moonlight glinted from polished on," said Masters reassuringly. Don't house to the deck. Salters was peermetal. Salters saw it first, slipped a worry, ma'am, you'll be all right; you ing at him from the shelter of the thoughtful interest. man on his back.

"Cashed in," he observed to Salters,

four swift reports, and the assailants agreeable to one coming from a tem-were down to a man, each with a perature of perhaps 16 degrees.

There were four bullet holes bly, and, clinging to his precious wheel

ing in a man of his burly size. Masters have turned back. followed eagerly.

ers, breathless again. "Now twist her her!" He stared ahead. blade of an oar, but beneath the built blade of the mountain etc. blade of an oar, but beneath the built blade of an oar, but beneath the built blade of an oar, but beneath the built blade of the mountain etc. blade of the bla at the least she had shortened the that star where she's pintin' now." "Over-top o' that pole on the front of

> "Huh-that's it, now twist her a leeplains, and now it seemed to his skilled twist the wheed offen her—huh!" estimation that the black cluster on her Satisfied that the man's intelligence

was equal to the novel task, Salters climbed below to the warm engine room; Masters, grinning with delight, utterly unmindful of occasional bullets amazer ripping past him, held the wheel in an jokin'." A few minutes later the firing grew more distant, when Salters returned to see how the raw helmsman

"Why, it's easy as ropin' a steer, eried Masters, proudly delighted. "Huh-she's beginnin' to go," grum-Salters, "the ingyne ain't workin' like bled Salters. "Oncet them engynes gits

"Lord o' love," cried Masters, "jes" "All right, old pard-" answered Mas- luk at them waves! Ain't they dan-He glanced over the starboard and stood by the taffrail, reckless, bow and almost yelled with excitement

"Hey, Salters-what's that thing?-"Huh-schooner tackin' in-shore here comfort of the engine room. Lansing

emptied his big revolver, he noticed Bad Lands with a sheriff and a posse heal into a noose ca'm and deliberate;

traversing ship; he looked at her as much as he dared to lift mind and eye from his task. Perhaps she was coming from Africa, from Asia, from South America, dreamwords all, mere names, yet tonight sharp and real—and then mindful of his charge, his keen eyes swept back to the bow of his own vessel as it wove figures on the white horizon. His straight brows came lower end the thin lips, compressed from the intensity of his effort to hold a true ourse; it was not that he dreaded capture or the shots which had ceased without his observance; it was the desire to do the thing well in the face of that great, watchful element to whom ne was a stranger. A little later Salters came into the

"What's all this you been tellin that fairy about seein her safe home?" he demanded roughly of Masters, who had rather expected a little appreciation of nis skill as a helmsman

The cowboy's head revolved slowly until his face was almost against that of the other man, and all that was criminal in him lurked in the lines about the hard mouth, narrowed eyes and high cheek bones. It was his fate, had been in the past his fate to hear the wrong words ust at the wrong time; many a log is spoiled in this way. "That's somethin' we'll discuss when

we get to the aidge of the timber, Mr. Salters, sir." He answered in a dry roice of ill-omened politeness. "It's somethin' we'll discuss right now!" blustered Salters, beginning to

"All right, Mr. Salters," said the cow-"Go ahead and discuss then, an' be d- to you." He looked ahead and slightly twisted the wheel, but his line f vision was to the side as well as the fore. Salters began to sound. Master's face was now purely criminal. "Lansing says he heard you promis-

in her to see she got back home. "Lansing's got years like a jackrab-bit, hain't he," said Masters pleasantly. They sort o' p'int up and give away his location. though, that what goes in his years don't get lost out o' his mouth.

"Huh," panted Salters, watching him from his red little eyes. "She ain't no French maid, Salters she's the lady of that there house, continued the cowboy, on whom the witchery of the night acted for pacifi-

"Huh," said Salters, mistaking the motive of friendliness, "huh, you just

right. Again Masters turned in that slow manner and looked at the other quietly and at close range, then returned to his scrutiny of the sea head.

"Maybe, Mr. Salters-maybe-but bein' that green, won't you mind tellin' me your plans for the lady?" The thin voice was honey-sweet; the criminal face homicidal.

"My plans is to hang onto her as long as there's any danger of gettin' night, if we ain't took, we c'n slip into the sounds and up some crik, where we e'n lie quiet and peaceful; then maybe after a while, if the lady's friends want to pay the freight, they c'n have her back, and if they don't-

plan the whole time?"

"Well," Masters' voice was cheerfully asked, and her voice had lost its tremreminiscent, "I have known some stinkers in my time, but if you ain't Master laughed. "Me? I never saw the boss hydrophoby cat o' the bunch "Come down in the cabin, miss," he it until today. I declare, I never did I'll eat my gun! Why, you ornery, lowsnarled. "I ain't in for no kidnappin'."

"You'll be in fer ten years, you fool, if you ain't quick with that boat—huh." panted Salters.

Murphy, quietly ready, slid the boat back home all right, and mighty soon cede any effort; when it came the long ers said you was a French maid, "Listen!" she cried suddenly, raising other man was pointed, but the two resplintering a thwart; the noise had none, but we was afraid to leave you last brought with it a scream, muf-house; Masters' powder burned Saltfled, but shocking. Masters sprang for ers' eyebrows, but the splash of the big she the ladder and reached the deck in time body as it went backwards over the rail to see Murphy pitched headforemost was lost in the crash of the seas under "Oh, we're jes' runnin' away, I reck- through the open door of the wheel- the full bilges, and for a moment Mas-

gilded tenderfoot," he mused, and was have fallen into the water had not one her below. Striking a match, he discovered a lamp slung in gimbles from the others grasped his arm; holding covered a lamp slung in gimbles from Salters angrily. "Lansing's sick as a run untended when the door of the fool an' I got to run the engyne." Masters' eyes sparkled. "Don't ye and he looked down to see the lady

Masters lit the lamp and looked through the light structure of the wheel bout with involutary interest. thouse: Masters felt that to stand there, her with the other. "Xcuse me, but "Say," he cried inquisitively, "this is the wheel in his hands, successfully diright cozy, ain't it?" the wheel in his hands, successfully directing the course of that great vessel. recting the course of that great vessel, she is or you can't tell what might hap-The note of unmistakable interest would be the proudest achievement of pen. Them waves is gettin' awful big." she stepped in, swinging the door be-"Come in an' try then," grunted Salt- hind her. "You need not be so anxers and leaped across the deck and up jous," said she, and Master was puzto the wheel with a nimbleness surpris- zled at the irony of her tone. "They

"Who? Oh, you mean the tug?" He "Git a-hold of her-huh," panted Salt- laughed. "I declare, I fergot all about

> presently "That's what I'd like to know!" His voice was jocosely frank. "I've got to front of us!" keep her goin' like she is or she might

sharply. little sea like this could do her no go back, too?"

"Indeed, I am not! I am used to finite scorn.

to you because you have never been a pretty gal's years while she was aon deep water; as a matter of fact, wearin' them. Where I come from a they are not at all dangerous.'

ings not only with utter lack of fear, but even with familiarity, smote him with amazement and respect. "I reckon you're right, ma'am," he answered with a shamefaced laugh. "I this the crimson sun hauled out in kinder thought this was right danger- sharp and lurid outline and stretched ous. One of these big waves might across to paint the dying breee a rosy of every racking impulse, loose nerves ter's serge cloak hung slack, and well come on board like—" he glanced at pink. Above it, giant rays shot to the a-jangle, yet sustained by the ratlike to the left, that Lansing fired.

it had never been his part to magnify "It would do no harm if one did," she then he turned quietly to his comanswered, "indeed, I expect that a good panion: many may break aboard when you turn around." She looked him steadily

"I hadn't thought much about goin'

"You will not be running your head



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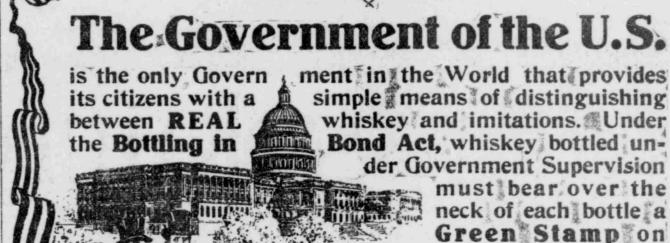
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"Two," corrected Masters laconically The big fellow, him we called Salters, tried to get gay-wanted to lug you off up some crik and keep you there "Where are you going?" she asked until your folk unloosened. I wouldn't stand for that-we fit, and he got the worst of it. My! ain't that pretty in

The woman shivered, "I ought to thank you," she said feverishly, but "What nonsense!" she answered, the other man—there were four, were narply. "This is a big, able boat; a there not? Can't you persuade him to "Oh, he don't need no persuadin'; he

"It can't!" cried the cowboy in ain't no account anyhow; why, he's amazement. "Little sea-ah, you're seasick down there in the engine room," answered the cowboy with in "He's just a ornery sor boats; my husband has a yacht about of sneakthief; he was tellin' last night the size of this. The waves seem big how he yanked some earrings out of boy that owned up to a thing like that Masters stared at her in sheepish wouldn't last as long as a snake on a dismay. To see the delicate woman at hog ranch. Say, ma'am-just look his side view the appalling surround- yonder. Ain't that a sight?"

The high north wind had been falling rapidly since the dawn, far seaward a lee set of haze was hung like a veil to dim the edge of the horizon; through her hopefully and with an odd shyness; | zenith. Masters stared in silent awe until the

great disk had lifted clear of the sea:

and no account. Say, I'm a-goin' to The wheelhouse was above and just take you straight back home."

The wheelhouse was above and just the upward thrust of the pump ectake you straight back home." take you straight back home.' Lansing, the ex-clerk, listening at maintain the proper elevation Lansing he fell; the reversing clutch gathered the little trap through which the wheelto the falling sea he was convalescent to its frame.

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courage vouchsafed to the cornered The smoke of the first shot obscured

his view: then through the bluish haze He slunk back now to his former po-sition, although there was slight need reeling to the heave of the boat, and of slinking. Lansing nevertheless fired again; perhaps he might have "Sav." his voiced was slightly hushed slipped with stealth and a shaking dia- fired at the woman also, crazed as he "this thing is bigger than I am-- phragm to a position which brought was, but here the vibration of the enmakes me feel kinder mean and ornery his face against the little aperture. gine jarred his boot sole from the nut.

It was nearly noon when the disabled